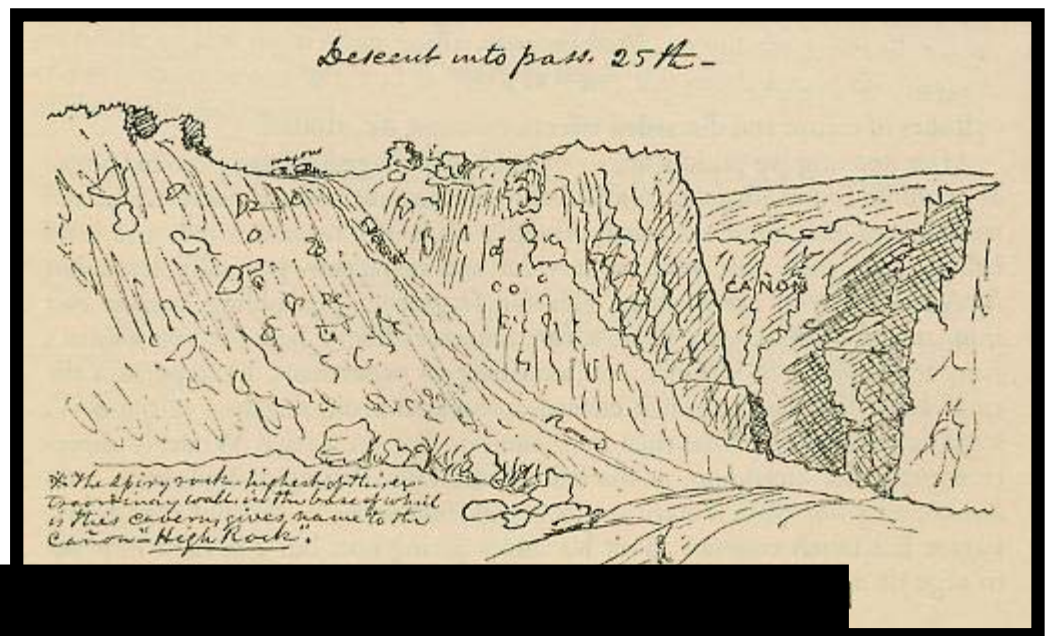


Bruff's  
1849  
sketch of  
"Descent  
into High  
Rock  
Canyon"



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

# Chapter 1



*Aspen  
groves in the  
North Black  
Rock Range  
Wilderness*

## Introduction

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Black Rock Desert–High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA) and ten associated Wilderness Areas in northwest Nevada were established by Act of Congress in December 2000 (contained in Appendix A) to conserve, protect and enhance resources associated with the historic Oregon and California Emigrant Trails and surrounding areas for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. This legislation directed the Secretary of the Interior, through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), to manage the NCA and Wilderness Areas in a way that conserves and protects the resources identified in the NCA Act.

The NCA Act found that the Black Rock–High Rock planning area contained nationally significant historic trails; an absence of development; unique Great Basin biota; and significant cultural, archaeological, paleontological, and geographical resources. The Act identified wilderness and recreation as values and resources to be conserved, protected and enhanced; and grazing and large-scale permitted events as resource values that are expected to continue in accordance with this Resource Management Plan and other applicable laws and regulations.

In summary, the Black Rock-High Rock country is a very special piece of the American landscape. It encompasses the prehistory of the continent, our nation's history, natural beauty and wildlife, and offers our generation a glimpse of the United States much as it was in its formative youth, in the earliest days of European-American settlement. Congress recognized this and sought, through legislation, to preserve this exceptional area and by doing so to ensure that the extraordinary experiences it provides today will still be available to future generations.



Bruff's 1849 sketch of "Boiling Spring at Black Rock"

Photo Credit

## 1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) is to carry out the vision of Congress as it was expressed in the NCA Act of 2000. The need for the RMP is to comply with the requirement of the Act requiring BLM to prepare a comprehensive land use plan within three years. This Resource Management Plan is that land use plan.

## 1.3 PLANNING AREA

The Black Rock-High Rock planning area consists of 1.2 million acres of public lands in northwest Nevada (Map 1-1). This area – approximately the size of the State of Delaware – extends across portions of Washoe, Pershing and Humboldt Counties and is administered by BLM's Winnemucca (Nevada) and Surprise (California) Field Offices. The provisions of the NCA Act apply to the NCA and the Wilderness Areas (totaling 1,172,680 acres), but several other relatively small areas not covered by the NCA Act are included in the planning area because they are contiguous to the NCA or Wilderness and similar planning issues apply to them (Table 1-1). These other areas (totaling 32,360 acres) are: the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Area [consisting of the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Wilderness Study Area (WSA), acquired federal lands within the WSA, the sliver of public land located between the WSA and the Summit Lake Paiute Indian Reservation, and other contiguous parcels and road and motorized trail corridors], the South Playa located between the south boundary of the NCA and the town of Gerlach, Nevada, and road and motorized trail corridors associated with Wilderness access and boundaries and with the NCA boundary. Collectively, the NCA, Wilderness and these other contiguous lands comprise the planning area to which this plan applies. This plan provides the framework required to effectively manage all lands included in the planning area, whether or not the NCA Act applies to those lands. This RMP also replaces four existing land use plans that applied to the respective part of this RMP planning area. The existing land use plans still provide valid guidance to the lands outside this RMP planning and are not superceded by this RMP outside the planning area. The land use plans are: Tuledad/Home Camp Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1976), Sonoma/Gerlach MFP (1982), Paradise/Denio MFP (1982), and Cowhead/Massacre MFP (1983).

Table 1-1. Federal Acreage of Planning Area Units

Planning Area Unit	Land Area (Acres)
<b><i>Lands designated in the NCA Act</i></b>	
NCA , including 378,329 acres of wilderness inside NCA:	799,165
Wilderness Areas outside the NCA:	373,515
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,172,680</b>
Note: the <b>entire</b> designated as wilderness <b>encompasses</b> 751,844 acres	
<b><i>Other Areas covered in RMP</i></b>	
Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (LCT) Area: Which includes:	
<i>LCT WSA:</i>	<i>12,378 acres</i>
<i>Acquired Public Lands in but not part of WSA:</i>	<i>734 acres</i>
<i>Area between WSA &amp; Summit Lake Reservation:</i>	<i>2,186 acres</i>
<i>Road Corridors south and west of WSA:</i>	<i>448 acres</i>
LCT Area sub-total:	15,746

Table 1-1. Federal Acreage of Planning Area Units

Planning Area Unit	Land Area (Acres)
South Playa:	14,672
Road and Motorized Trail Corridors: (Not Included in LCT Area)	1,942
<b>Total of Other Areas:</b>	<b>32,360</b>
<b>Grand Total Federal Acres in Planning Area <sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1,205,040</b>

<sup>1</sup>**Note:** Total land area within the planning area boundaries is 1,222,816 acres. This includes 17,776 acres of intermingled private lands that are not part of the planning area and are not covered by the RMP.

## 1.4 SETTING

The planning area is vast and diverse. It is both typical of the northwestern Great Basin and unique in the resources and habitats it encompasses. It includes one of the flattest places on Earth, the 165-square-mile Black Rock Desert Playa; and several jagged mountain ranges thrusting nearly a mile above the desert floor. Most of its area is sparsely vegetated desert receiving less than 6 inches of precipitation per year, but in this unique place looks are deceiving.

The landscape of the planning area is sparsely vegetated, primitive and exposed. Dominant terrain features include open desert playas (dry lake beds) with reflective whitish-beige, silt surfaces and rocky shorelines, making them appear – especially at dawn, dusk and in moonlight – much like the living lakes they were ten thousand years ago; sagebrush flats, bajadas (slopes at the feet of mountains) and rolling hills – grazed by pronghorn antelope – create the transition from playa and desert floor to the surrounding canyons and mountains that are home to deer and bighorn sheep. In the low country widely separated hot springs bubble to the surface from deep underground, some of which create streams that provide habitat to a unique species of fish, the Soldier Meadow desert dace, found nowhere else on Earth. Small, shallow, ephemeral lakes and intermittent and perennial streams are scattered throughout the transition and mountain parts of planning area. Some of the colder, perennial streams in the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Wilderness Study Area and adjacent public lands that feed nearby Summit Lake provide habitats for one of the last two remaining genetically pure populations of the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout. And the High Rock Canyon part of the planning area features cliffs, canyons, rimrock, and sagebrush steppe habitats favored by bighorn sheep and raptors for rearing their young.

Significant cultural resources are found throughout the planning area, including the Applegate-Lassen Emigrant Trail, designated as a national historic trail. Other historic resources include the Nobles Trail, the route of the old Western Pacific Railroad (now Union Pacific), sites associated with seven historic mining districts, military sites, and traces of an early motion picture location and past ranching activity. Prehistoric resources are also well represented, with quarrying sites, lithic scatters, rock shelters and caves, campsites, and rock art.

The first trail through the Black Rock-High Rock country was blazed by the famous explorer John C. Fremont in 1843-44. A few years later, emigrants to Oregon and California built on Fremont's exploration to create branching and intersecting wagon routes across the area. No one knows for certain the total number of pioneers who used these trails to travel the 2000 miles from the settlements Back East "in the States" to California and the Pacific Northwest, but it is generally accepted that 7 to 9 thousand did so in the year 1849 alone. This was an epochal migration that helped lead to early statehood for California (1850) and Oregon (1859). Today the landscape within the planning area looks and feels much the same as it did to those early emigrants. A goal of this RMP is to protect that view and the experiences it engenders into the future.

## 1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

This RMP was developed in a collaborative setting and is the result of extensive input and idea sharing provided by Native American Tribes, State and other federal agencies, a subgroup created by two Resource Advisory Councils (RACs), area residents, interest groups, and members of the general public who all contributed extensively throughout the planning process.

Public participation was sought within weeks of passage of the NCA Act of 2000 when Tribal governments, and State and federal agencies were invited to consult with BLM throughout the planning process, and when the



*Emigrant  
Trail  
through  
High Rock  
Canyon*

general public was asked to comment. Ideas and concerns submitted from all sources were carefully considered by BLM during preparation of the Draft RMP, and the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) were fully met.

In June of 2001, the Winnemucca Field Office sponsored a three-day training session entitled “Community-Based Partnerships and Ecosystems: Ensuring a Healthy Environment.” This 3-day course, presented by BLM’s National Training Center in Phoenix, Arizona, was attended by about 60 people from BLM, Tribal, State and local governments, other federal agencies, and the general public, including several members of the RAC NCA Subgroup. The course showcased successful collaborative planning and management efforts from around the nation and provided guidance on how to achieve similar results in the local area. This training set the stage for the successful collaborative planning process that developed this Resource Management Plan.

BLM used various mechanisms to maintain contact with participants in the planning process including: agency letters, a project website, newsletters, press releases, and media ads. BLM met directly with participants at many meetings in two states. These meetings included official consultations with Tribal Councils and various State and federal agencies, informational and scoping meetings with the general public and constituent groups, and meetings with the RAC NCA Subgroup held at key milestones during the process.

In addition to formal consultation with Native American Tribal governments, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State Historic Preservation Office, several other groups were convened to assist BLM in preparing the RMP. A State Black Rock Planning Team consisting of representatives from State of Nevada agencies was formed and tasked with providing input into the development of this RMP and insuring that it was as consistent as possible with the laws and resource related plans, policies and programs of the State of Nevada. Coordination and consultation was also conducted with an Economics Sub-Team composed of representatives from Washoe County, Nevada, Humboldt County, Nevada, Pershing County, Nevada, Modoc County, California, the Nevada Association of County Governments, University of Nevada-Reno, Nevada BLM State Office, and members of the Black Rock-High Rock planning team.

The contributions to the successful development of the RMP made by the RAC NCA Subgroup formed by the Northeast California and Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Councils cannot be overstated. The subgroup was composed of 26 RAC members and representatives of constituent and stakeholder groups, Tribal, State and local governments, and the general public. Over a



2½ -year period the subgroup met ten times with BLM managers and staff. Subgroup members donated hundreds of hours of their time learning the details of all of the most controversial and difficult issues connected with management of the Black Rock-High Rock area. The subgroup members worked hard with BLM planners to try to reach consensus on these issues and develop the best management alternatives. Consensus was reached on most issues and in the remainder majority positions emerged with differing views noted. Reports were made to the parent RACs on this work and the RACs used the information provided by the subgroup to advise BLM on how various issues should be addressed in the RMP. Of the 82 RAC NCA Subgroup decisions recommended by a consensus of the group, 81 are included in this RMP. BLM sincerely appreciates the hard work contributed by every member of this remarkable group of concerned and involved people during this long and complex planning effort.

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## 1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN



*Aspen Grove on Mahogany Creek*

The RMP is in three chapters:

**Chapter 1** (this section) includes background information, the purpose and need for the plan, an overview of the planning process, and the vision and objectives for the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System, which includes National Conservation Areas and Wilderness units, and the management goals for the Black Rock-High Rock planning area.

**Chapter 2** contains resource and program specific objectives and decisions grouped by resource program.

**Chapter 3** includes information on how the plan will be implemented. Topics covered include adaptive management, monitoring of resources and plan decisions, evaluation of the plan and the objectives, implementation priorities and time frames and coordination with other plans, and future changes to the RMP.

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## 1.7 MISSION AND VISION

### 1.7.1 NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM

An essential consideration in developing the RMP was that it be consistent with the overall vision of BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The NLCS assembles BLM's premier designations, including NCAs and Wilderness Areas, into an organized system to increase public awareness of the cultural, scientific, educational, ecological, and other values associated with these areas.

***The NLCS overall vision: "BLM's Great American Landscapes: healthy, wild and open."***

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### ***Five NLCS objectives help to achieve this vision:***

- Above all, commit to conserving, protecting and restoring special values of the landscape, as directed by BLM's organic act [the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA)].
- Build and sustain community relationships to foster collaborative stewardship.
- Continue to manage compatible uses and valid existing rights, consistent with the values for which the area was designated.
- Provide opportunities for the individual to explore and discover these special areas.
- Foster scientific research and public education and acquire a better understanding of how to manage these landscapes.

### **1.7.2 PLANNING AREA GOALS**

The planning process included development of broad goals to assure that the RMP would be consistent with the spirit and intent of legislative and other constraints and with the overall mission of the National Landscape Conservation System.

BLM worked with the previously mentioned RAC NCA Subgroup, a 26-member group composed of representatives of the Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin and Northeastern California RACs, as well as citizen members with particular interests in the planning area, including representatives of Tribal, State and local governments to identify goals for the planning area. These goals are listed below.

**Goal 1:** Provide current and future generations of Americans with unique opportunities to experience what the emigrants experienced.

- Preserve significant segments and the setting of the national historic emigrant trails within the planning area.
- Preserve opportunities for solitude and primitive experiences within the viewshed of historic emigrant and exploration trails.

**Goal 2:** Protect a large area of the Northern Great Basin in its current, predominantly natural state and prevent further decline of associated resources.

- Preserve archaeological, paleontological, geological, and geographical resources of the region.
- Protect the remote and undeveloped character of the landscape.
- Foster scientific inquiry and research to enhance resource management and public education.

**Goal 3:** Support visitor services and resource management activities in a manner that protects the planning area's resources.

- Provide educational materials to the public to assist in the protection and interpretation of the area's resources.
- Provide opportunities for visitor activities, including large-scale permitted activities on the Black Rock Desert Playa, recognizing that the playa is the primary destination for the majority of visitors to the NCA.
- Maintain access for the reasonable use and enjoyment of the planning area.

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**Goal 4:** Manage the planning area's plant and animal species in a way that would provide for their continued presence as part of a healthy ecological system.

- Manage wild horses and burros to achieve identified appropriate management levels (AMLs).
- Recover populations and habitats of special status, previously eliminated, or declining plant and animal species.
- Enhance native and desired naturalized wildlife.

**Goal 5:** Manage Wilderness Areas for visitors' use and enjoyment, in a manner that would provide opportunities for solitude and primitive experiences while leaving the areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.

- Manage Wilderness Areas under a principle of non-degradation, by using the minimum tools, equipment and structures necessary to successfully, safely and economically accomplish effective wilderness management.
- Allow for spontaneity of use and preserve as much freedom from regulation as possible.
- Manage nonconforming but accepted uses in a way that prevents unnecessary degradation of the area's wilderness character.

**Goal 6:** Allow for social and economic uses that benefit local communities compatible with the protection of the area.

- Maintain permitted grazing activities in a manner compatible with the rangeland health of the area and consistent with standards and guidelines.
- Manage and sustain multiple-use activities consistent with applicable legislation.
- Provide reasonable access to privately owned land or interests (including valid and existing rights) on land within the boundaries of the planning area, consistent with historical multiple use.

**Goal 7:** Provide for the protection of cultural, religious and agricultural values developed through historical practices in the planning area.

**Goal 8:** Cooperate and partner with local, State, Tribal, and other collaborating agencies and private interests to support resource management activities and ensure consistency among plans and policies where these are consistent with federal laws and regulations.